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ABSTRACT

This study assessed teachers' opinions about the promotion of immature children to first grade. A total of 224 teachers from private and public elementary schools in Mississippi completed a questionnaire that addressed such issues as the relation between maturity and readiness, repetition of kindergarten, academic and peer pressure, and the preparatory role of kindergarten and nursery school. Descriptions of responses to specific questions are provided. Results supported the position that most teachers, and especially those in private schools, recognize the need for immature children to be allowed to gain maturity by spending more time in kindergarten. Teachers reported that most children gain understanding and confidence with a second year of kindergarten. Teachers also reported that some children are difficult to evaluate in regard to their readiness to enter first grade. It is concluded that school systems should offer transitional classrooms for children between kindergarten and first grade, and that immature children should be allowed to remain in kindergarten for a second year. Appendices include 7 references, 18 questions from the teacher survey, and tables of quantitative data from the study. (GLR)

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Teachers' Opinions Concerning Immature Children and Their Promotion to First Grade

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Running head: Teachers' Opinions

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Abstract

Readiness, and opinions concerning immature children entering first grade were assessed from 224 teachers from ten schools in Mississippi. There were seven public schools and three private schools. The results indicated that teachers support giving children, assessed as immature children, more time before entering first grade.

Introduction

Teachers' Opinions Concerning Immature Children and Promotion to First Grade

Kindergarten teachers know that children need certain skills and development, such as social skills, language skills, cognitive, and physical development to be successful in first grade. The single promotional factor to enter first grade is for a child to reach the age of 6 by a certain date established by different school systems.

President Bush has set national goals for our schools to be carried out by the targeted year 2000. One of the proposals for an education strategy in America 2000 is "All children in America will start school ready to learn" (Bush,1991). The factor of "ready to learn" is developmentally different for some children (Uphoff 1985).

National researchers and specialists have taken sides concerning the issue of giving immature children more time (Uphoff 1986) or promoting all kindergarten children to first grade(Shepard,1990).

Developmental theorists tend to agree on the principle that people develop at different rates(Woolfolk,1980). Teachers have felt the

dilemma of this principle. Teachers see the differences in development and evaluate children in developmental areas. When a child needs more growth in one or more of these areas, the time table for that child needs to be prolonged. The present study was designed to assess teacher views, from public and private schools, concerning immature children and promotion to 1st grade.

Methodology

Subjects

The sample for this questionnaire (see Appendix) was obtained from 10 schools in Mississippi. The schools were in the northern, southern, and Delta area. There were 3 private schools and 7 public schools. There were 224 teachers who participated in the questionnaire. The 3 private schools were located in the Delta area and 3 of the public schools were from the Delta area. Mississippi schools continue to be rated low educational achievement. The low educational achievement in the Delta area schools have been analyzed to be most severe(Jones, et al.,1992).

The teachers who participated in the questionnaire were at the kindergarten through the fourth grade level. The questionnaire for the teachers contained demographic questions such as grade taught, years taught, degree obtained, and whether the school that they were in was public or private. The remaining 30 questions could be responded to by "yes", "no", or "no opinion".

The questionnaires were sent to kindergarten coordinators, headmasters, or principals at each school where they were distributed to the teachers.

The data was put on a database using the software "First Choice".

Results

Table 1 shows responses to each of the 18 items. Table 2 shows the responses according to public and private schools. Table 3 shows the responses according to teacher level. Figures 1-18 provide a graphic display of these responses for seven groups of the teachers:

Four levels of teacher (kindergarten, 1st grade, or third grade, and fourth grade);

Two types of school (public vs. private); and

Total responses for all teachers

For the present report, these responses will be presented descriptively, rather than use inferential tests of significance. Thus, our conclusions will be limited to the teachers among the 10 schools sampled. Selected response patterns that follow indicate that there are some important variations in responses by differing groups of teachers in these schools.

Responses to Items 5 and 6 indicated that teachers believe kindergarten and nursery school should be required. Further, responses to Item 7 supported the practice of shifting some first grade activities to the kindergarten and nursery school level. There is much less agreement among teachers to Item 12, suggesting that many teachers believe above average students can overcome immaturity without being retained. Public school teachers were much less likely to endorse the practice of holding back an immature, but above average student than were private school teachers.

Responses to three items showed grade level trends that are noteworthy. Endorsement of Item 21 (more academic pressure) systematically decreased among teachers at higher grade levels. On the other hand, endorsement of Item 23 (signs of

struggle) showed rather large increases at higher grade levels. Finally, endorsement of Item 29 (safe than sorry) was much higher for Kindergarten Teachers than for teachers at any higher level.

Responses to six additional items suggested differences in approach between public school and private school teachers. First, responses to Items 12 and 29 showed that private school teachers were much more likely to recommend that immature children would benefit from being retained. Second, responses to Items 13, 20, and 28 showed that private school teachers had a stronger opinion about the maturity of the elementary student than were public school teachers. Third, responses to Item 23 showed that private school teachers reported a greater frequency of concern over "signs of struggle" among children.

Discussion

The results clearly supported the position that most teachers recognize the need for immature children to be allowed to gain maturity with more time in kindergarten. This was more true among the private schools than among the public schools. Since kindergarten is an important building block for a child's education to be build upon, success

should be readily achieved and a love for learning established. However, today's kindergarten is not merely a situation for play and social interaction. Item 7 shows teachers agree that many 1st grade activities have been shifted to kindergarten, thus putting more pressure on young children and teachers.

Teachers reported that most children gain understanding and confidence with a 2nd year of kindergarten. However, there are some children who are difficult to evaluate regarding whether or not they should go to first grade. Kindergarten teachers agreed that it is better to be safe than sorry when evaluating a borderline child. Other teachers had no strong opinion.

Teachers agreed that there is more academic pressure and peer pressure now than 10 years ago. Academic pressure has resulted from school systems moving academic skills down to the kindergarten level. Right or wrong, many preschool children are given formal instruction to be ready for first grade.

The "utopia" setting for elementary schools is not a reality. If all first grades, according to Stroud,(1992) were flexible environments,

developmentally appropriate curriculum based on concrete experiences, manipulative activities, and spontaneous play, then it would be plausible to send all children to first grade.

Teachers know the frustration that some children experience in elementary school. Teachers know that when a child struggles through the lower elementary that failure is down the road. Teachers know the anxiety of children that failure produces in elementary or Junior high. Teachers agreed, 77.6%, that most children who have been evaluated to repeat kindergarten would gain confidence, maturity, and understanding which would enable them to be the best first graders they could be. If a child needs to develop and mature with more time, 74.8% teachers agree that kindergarten is the best place.

Application

Each child has his/her own developmental growth. Each child should be observed and evaluated according to his/her developental growth. School systems should offer transitional classrooms, classes developed to come between kindergarten and first grade. If this is not feasible, systems should allow immature children to remain in the kindergarten program another year. School policies should express positive attitudes concerning placement of an immature child that can be related to parents, which in turn will be related to the child.

References

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Appendix

Survey Questions used in Teacher Research

Responses were "Yes", "No", or "No Opinion"

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5. Kindergarten is essential for preparing children for 1st grade.

6. Nursery school is helpful in preparing children for kindergarten.

7. Many 1st grade activities have been moved back to kindergarten in the last 10 years.

12. Above average children who have been evaluated as immature need the 2nd year in kindergarten to mature.

13. Most children who seem mature, but do not understand all the kindergarten skills, gain understanding and confidence with a 2nd year of kindergarten.

19. I can usually spot a very young child just by observation.

20. Maturity and understanding need to go have in hand to enter first grade.

21. There is more academic pressure on children now than 10 years ago.

22. Peer pressure is greater than it was 10 years ago.

23. Children who show signs of struggle through the first three grades usually fail somewhere down the line or are requested to repeat a grade.

24. There are some children who are extremely hard to evaluate concerning whether they should go to first grade.

28. Many times when there is some doubt concerning the child's maturity, the child needs to repeat kindergarten.

29. Would you agree that it is better to be safe than sorry when evaluating a borderline child and recommending that he/she repeat kindergarten?

30. Would you agree that most children who have been evaluated to repeat kindergarten will gain confidence, maturity, and understanding which will enable them to be the best 1st graders they can be?

31. I am in favor of children repeating kindergarten if evaluated to do so.

32. I feel that kindergarten is the best place for children to repeat a grade when evaluated to do so.

33. Repeating kindergarten children do not, in general, object to another year of kindergarten.

34. Repeating a grade in upper elementary or junior high, in general, causes frustration and anxiety for the child.

Table 1

Teachers' Endorsement, Yes Number and Yes Percent, and Total Responses to Survey

represents number, % represents percent

Item #	Description	Yes #	Yes %	Total Responses
5	Kindergarten is essential	207	93.2	222
6	Nursery school is helpful	190	86.0	221
7	1st grade activities to K	153	69.5	219
12	Above average immature need time	60	27.4	219
13	Understanding & confidence/2nd yr	118	53.6	220
19	Spot a young child	146	57.3	217
20	Maturity & Understanding needed	172	78.5	219
21	More Academic pressure	198	89.2	222
22	Peer Pressure greater	196	88.7	221
23	Signs of struggle	176	80.0	220
24	Hard to evaluate	154	70.0	220
28	Doubt in maturity	95	43.2	220
29	Safe than sorry	130	59.6	218
30	Best 1st graders they can be	170	77.6	219
31	In favor of repeating K	196	88.7	221
32	K. is best place	166	74.8	222
33	K. do not object	116	52.5	221
34	Repeating upper grade	187	85.0	220

Table 2

Public and Private School Teachers' Endorsement of Selected Items

represents number, % represents percent

Item #	Public Yes #	Public Yes %	Private Yes #	Private Yes %	Average
5	187	93.5	20	90.9	92.2
6	172	86.4	17	77.3	81.8
7	136	68.7	17	77.3	73.0
12	47	23.9	14	63.6	43.8
13	104	52.5	16	72.7	62.6
19	133	68.2	14	63.6	65.9
20	154	78.2	20	90.9	84.6
21	178	89.0	19	86.4	87.7
22	176	88.4	20	90.9	89.7
23	154	77.8	22	100.0	88.9
24	140	70.7	15	68.2	69.5
28	82	41.4	13	59.1	50.3
29	113	57.7	19	86.4	72.1
30	152	77.2	20	90.9	84.1
31	175	87.9	21	95.5	91.7
32	148	74.0	18	81.8	77.9
33	105	52.8	13	59.1	56.0
34	170	85.9	19	86.4	86.2

Table 3

Teachers Grade Level Endorsement of Selected Items

represents number, % represents percent, K represents kindergarten

	Grade							
Item #	K #	K %	1st #	1st %	2nd & 3rd #	2nd & 3rd %	4th #	4 %
5	62	100.0	76	92.7	11	100.0	57	86.4
6	58	93.5	67	81.7	10	90.9	54	83.1
7	49	79.0	57	69.5	6	54.5	41	64.1
12	12	21.0	22	27.5	1	9.1	25	38.5
13	37	59.7	45	55.6	7	63.6	31	47.7
19	50	82.0	54	66.7	5	45.5	38	60.3
20	55	88.7	65	80.2	10	90.9	43	67.2
21	58	93.5	75	91.5	10	90.9	53	80.3
22	58	93.5	70	86.4	11	100.0	56	84.8
23	43	70.5	66	81.5	9	81.8	58	87.9
24	51	82.3	59	72.8	8	72.7	37	56.9
28	30	48.4	39	48.1	2	18.2	24	36.9
29	44	73.3	44	54.3	6	54.5	37	56.9
30	53	85.5	67	82.7	7	63.6	45	70.3
31	57	93.4	73	89.0	9	81.8	56	84.8
32	47	75.8	59	72.0	10	90.9	49	74.2
33	40	64.5	47	57.3	1	9.1	29	44.6
34	51	85.0	76	92.7	8	72.7	54	81.8

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Table 4

Total Teacher Responses "Yes", "No", "No Opinion"

represents number, % represents percent

Teacher Responses "Yes", "No", "No Opinion"

Item #	Y#	Y%	N#	N%	NP#	NP%
5	207	93.2	10	4.5	5	2.3
6	190	86.0	14	6.3	17	7.7
7	153	69.5	38	17.3	28	12.7
12	60	27.4	132	60.3	27	12.3
13	118	53.6	69	31.4	33	15.0
19	146	57.3	41	18.9	30	13.8
20	172	78.5	28	12.8	19	8.7
21	198	89.2	18	8.1	6	2.7
22	196	88.7	17	7.7	8	3.6
23	176	80.0	17	7.7	27	12.3
24	154	70.0	29	13.2	37	16.8
28	95	43.2	66	30.0	59	30.0
29	130	59.6	53	24.3	35	16.1
30	170	77.6	25	11.4	24	11.0
31	196	88.7	14	6.3	11	5.0
32	166	74.8	42	18.9	14	6.3
33	116	52.5	37	16.7	68	30.8
34	187	85.0	18	8.2	15	6.8

Figure 1

Item 5: Kindergarten is Essential
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

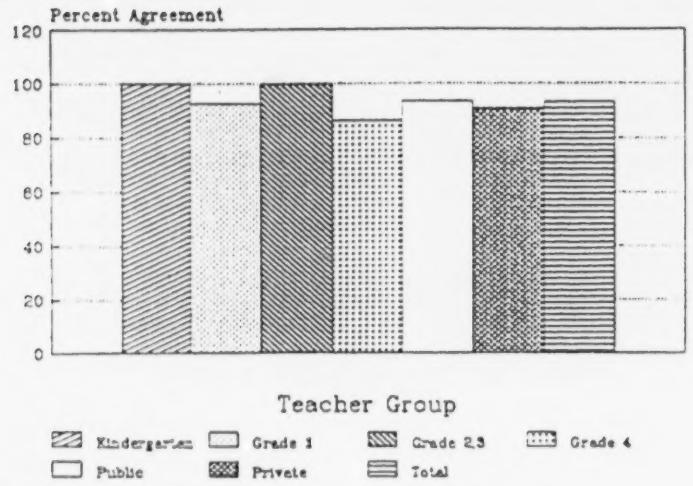

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Figure 2

Item 6: Nursery School is Helpful
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

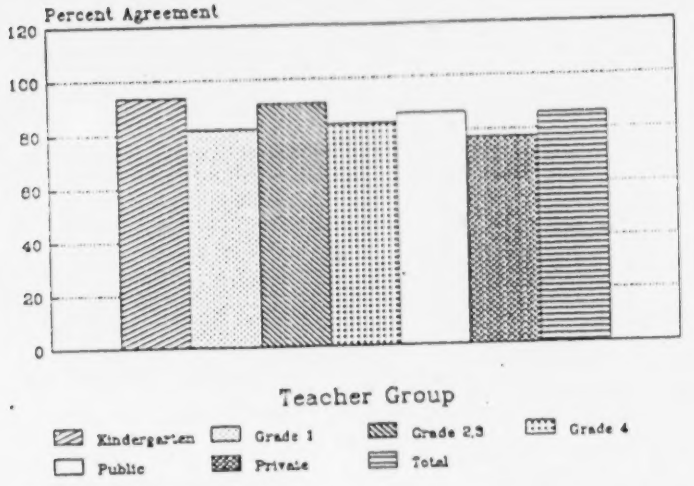

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Figure 3

Item 7: 1st Grade Activities -> K
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

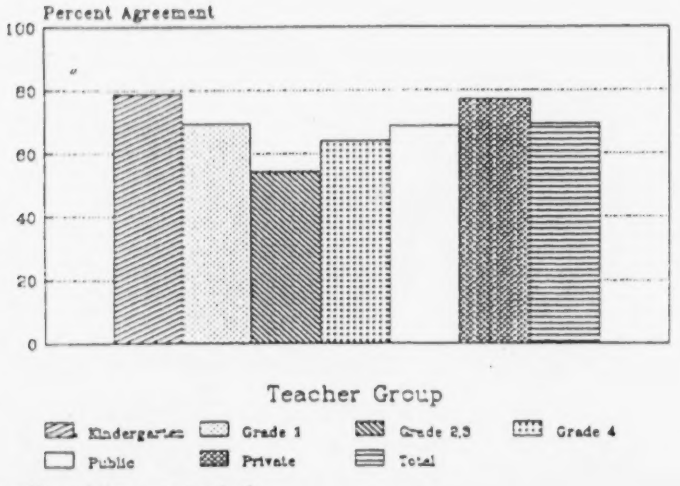

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Figure 4

Item 12: Even Bright May Need Extra Time
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

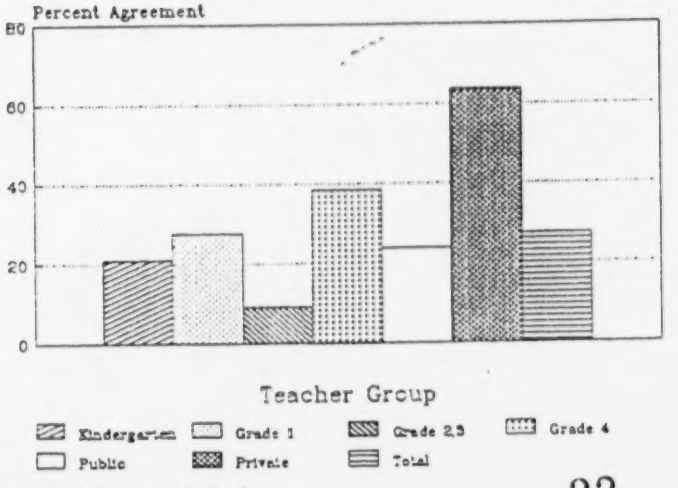

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Figure 5

Item 13: 2nd Year Confidence Important
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

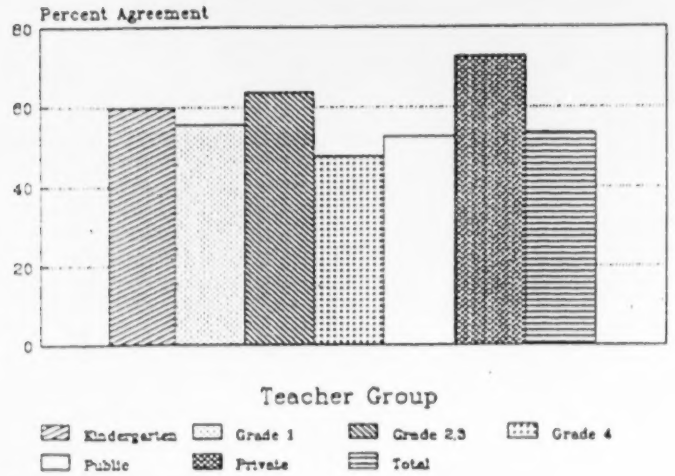

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Figure 6

Item 19: Identify a "Young" Child?
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

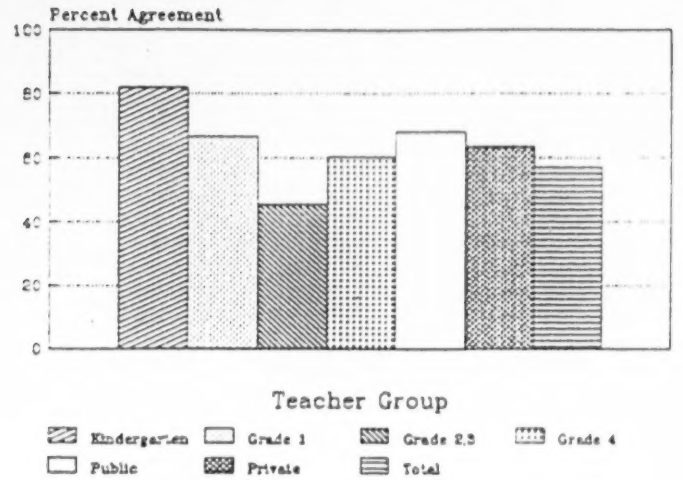

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Figure 7

Item 20: Need Maturity & Understanding
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

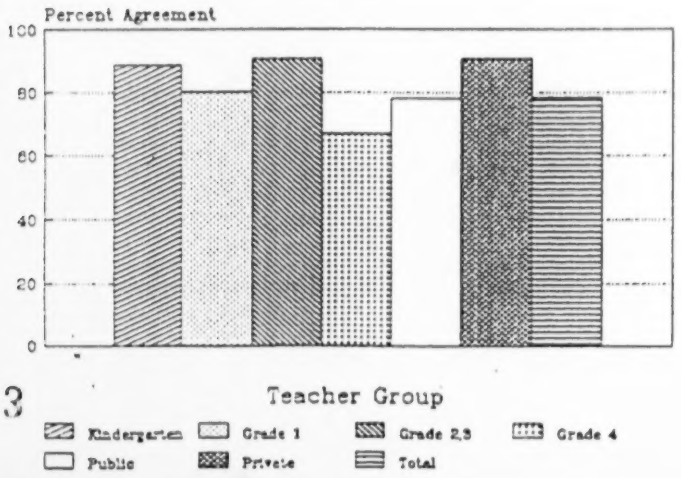

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Figure 8

Item 21: More Academic Pressure
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

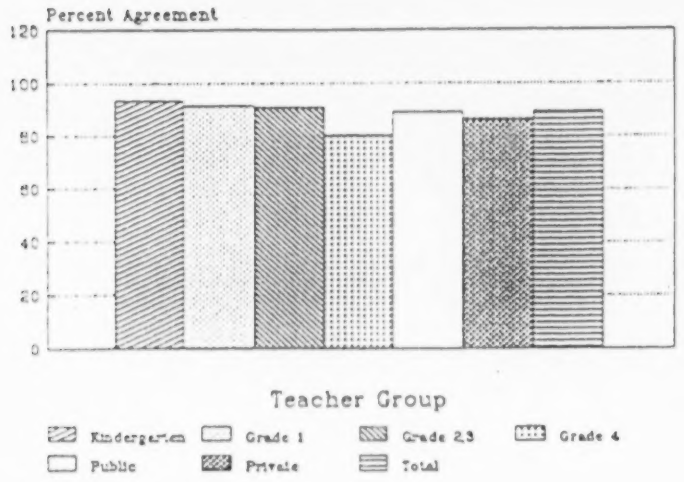

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Figure 9

Item 22: Greater Peer Pressure
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

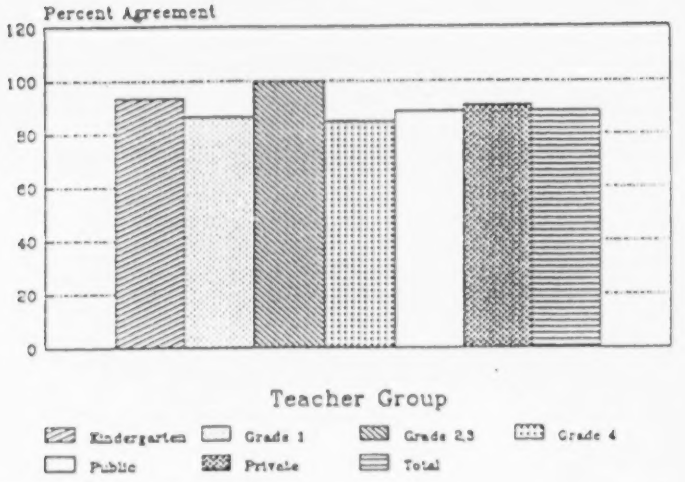

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Figure 10

Item 24: Hard to Evaluate
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

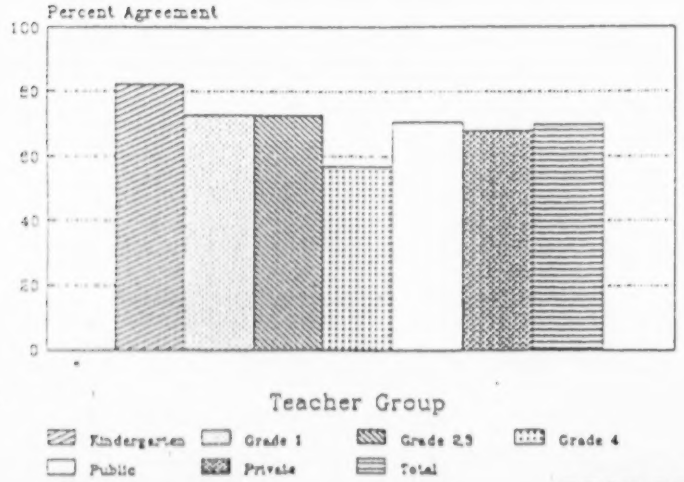

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Figure 11

Item 23: Signs of Struggle
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

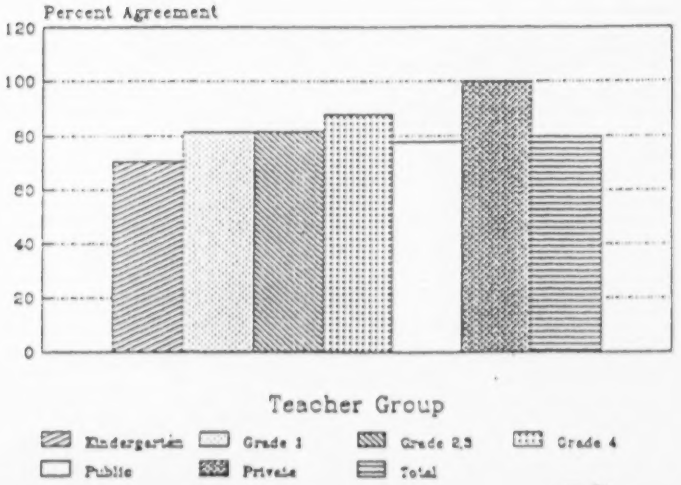

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Figure 12

Item 28: Doubt Maturity
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

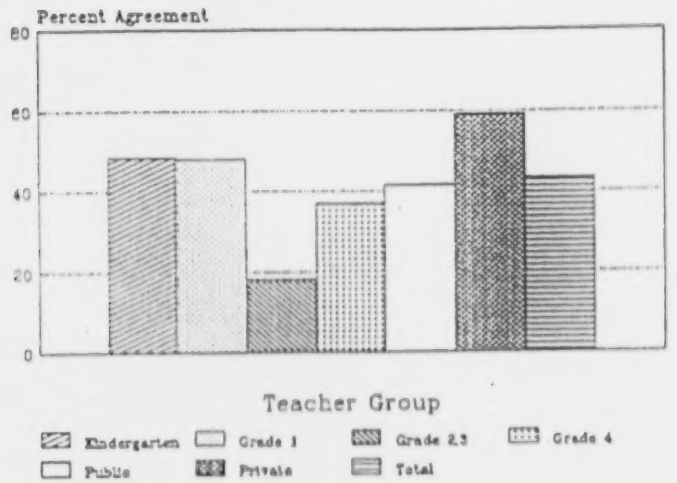

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Figure 13

Item 29: Better Safe Than Sorry
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

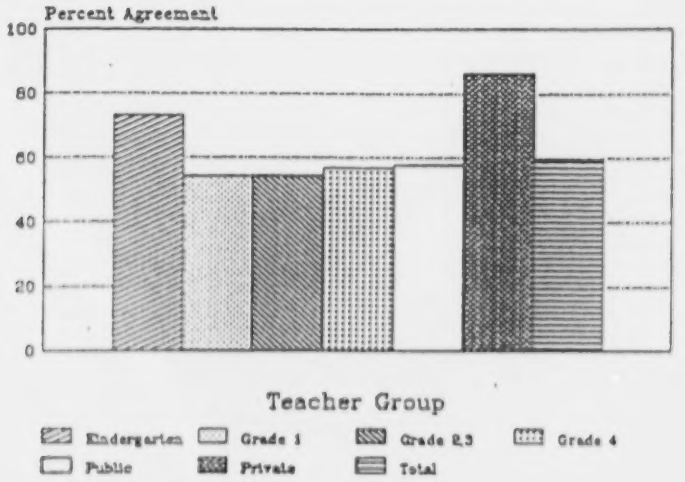

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Figure 14

Item 30: Best First Graders Possible
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

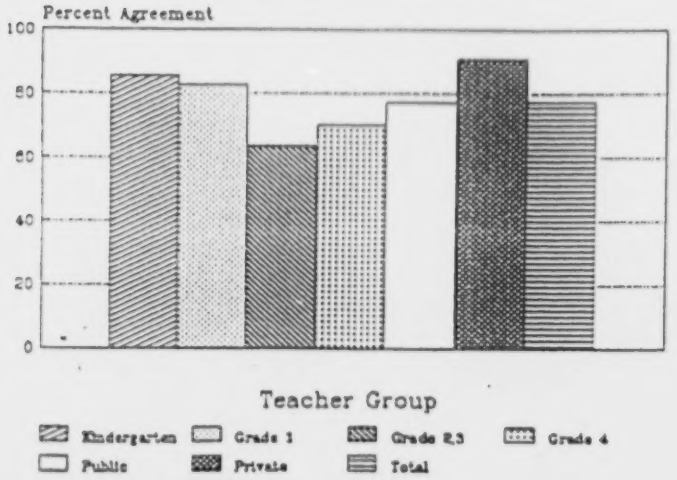

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Figure 15

Item 31: Favor Repeating Kindergarten
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

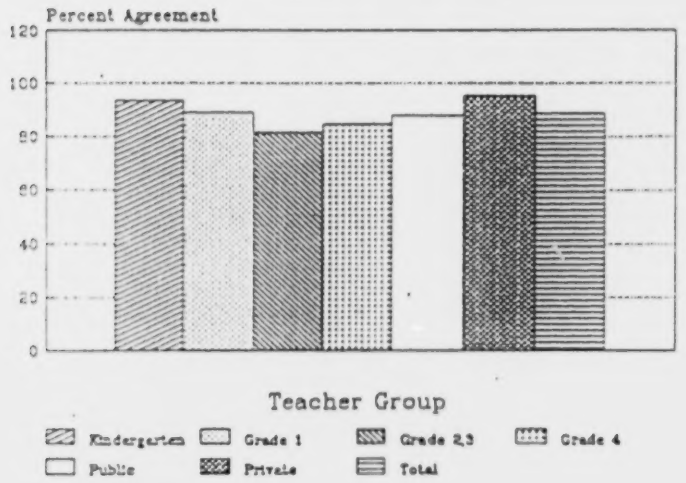

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Figure 16

Item 32: Kindergarten is Best Place
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

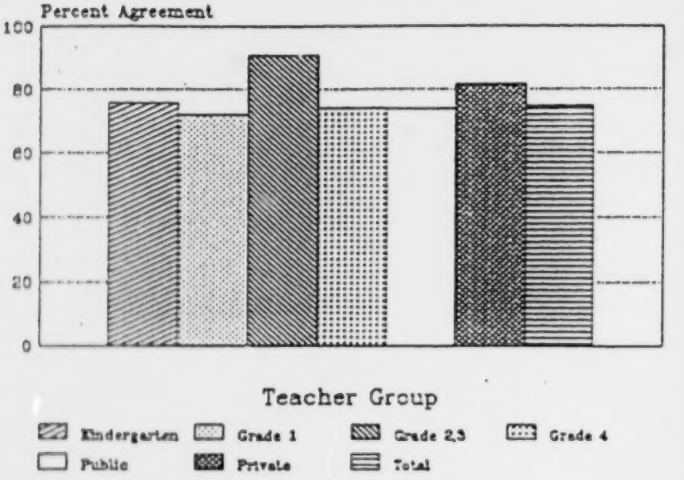

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Figure 17

Item 33: Kindergarten do not Object
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group

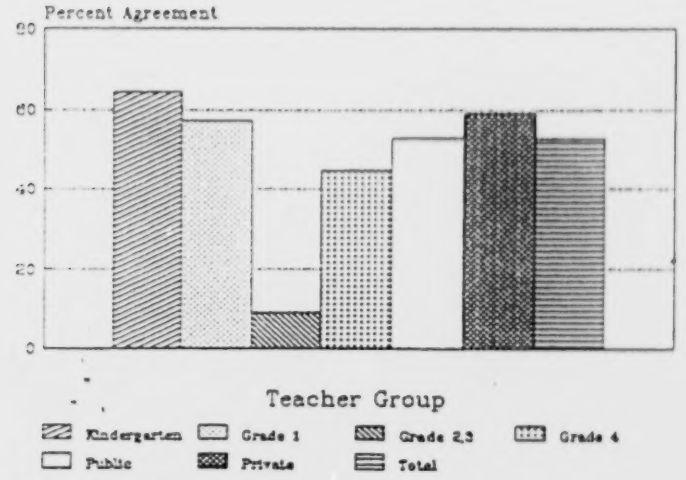

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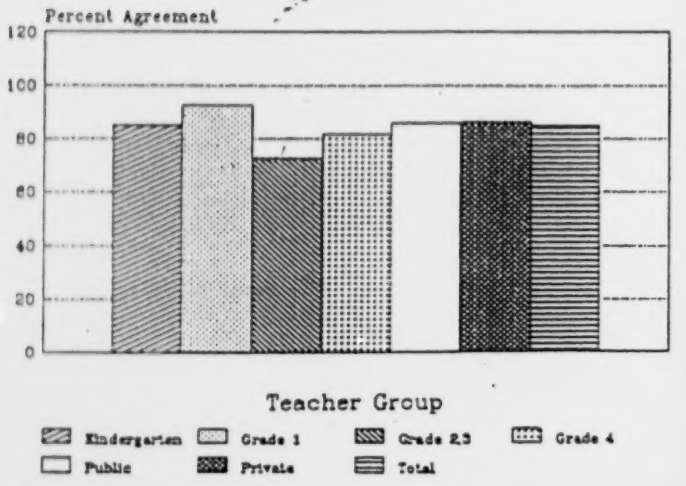
Figure 18

Item 34: Repeating Upper Grade
Percent Teacher Endorsement by Group



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